

PATHWAYS

Crossing the Narrow Bridge with Rebbe Nachman and His Students

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Light Up the Night!

By Yossi Katz

ONE OF MY fondest memories of living in Eretz Yisrael as a yeshivah *bachur* was standing outside the doorway of our Jerusalem apartment and lighting the Chanukah menorah. As there were quite a few of us, we had several menorahs, and it was truly a special sight. My roommate was very musical and had a beautiful voice. We would sit for a long while singing the Chanukah songs and prayers, and as time passed, we young American boys would be joined by many of the local Yerushalmi men. It was quite a scene!

As strange as it is was to see us American boys joined by our Yerushalmi neighbors, the idea of lighting a lamp outside one's home would seem ever stranger. For example, one usually lights the Shabbat candles in the dining room to benefit from their light while eating the festive Shabbat meals. The idea of standing outside the Jewish home, the place of the Jewish family's sanctity, and doing the mitzvah in the street is very unique indeed.

In the *Shema* we say that we are commanded to speak the words of the Torah "when you are sitting at home, traveling on the road..." (Deuteronomy 6:7). The home embodies the idea of sanctity and oneness with God. In fact, the Torah begins with the letter *beit* to signify that by fulfilling the Torah's commands, we become connected to the One who is the Master of the house (*bayit*).

On the other hand, the concept of travel is always fraught with danger since it involves spiritually distancing oneself by travelling outside the home. However, the mitzvot of the Torah help us even the playing field, so we can connect to God not only when we are sitting in the synagogue, in a yeshivah, or in our Jewish homes, but even as we travel outside. Through the mitzvot, every external and mundane act we engage in transforms and elevates us to the highest place of God's Unity.

The verse therefore continues, "[when you are] going to sleep and waking up." One usually goes to sleep at night. Night is the time of darkness and uncertainty, when God seems hidden or disconnected from us. But we just proclaimed, "God is One!" (ibid. 6:4). We firmly believe that even when there is a perceived distance between us, we are always connected to Him. Therefore we connect the darkness of night to the light of day, and extend the Oneness of our homes to the distance of travel.

Our Rabbis teach that God's Presence never descended below ten handbreadths. Nevertheless, we kindle the menorah at this height to show that in this very place, though God may not usually reveal Himself here, there is no doubt that His Unity embodies this space as well. Likewise, we light the menorah near the entrance to the house to symbolize that even as we navigate life's difficulties and feel removed from our natural place of sanctity, nevertheless, God is always with us. We begin lighting the menorah at nighttime to show that darkness is nothing but an illusion. Through our faith in God, and the light of the menorah, "night, like day, will shine brightly" (Psalms 139:12).

The nights of Chanukah are the longest nights of the year. Like the cold weather outside, this is the time of year where life tends to be bitter and spiritually challenging. However, the simple light of a Chanukah candle descends from the greatest of heights to the lowest of places to demonstrate that God is always next to us. By taking a step back from everything going on right now and turning on this light switch, we awaken the Jewish spark within us so it can grow just a bit every night, until it finally becomes a raging fire. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shluchin 3

A Chanukah Miracle

By Gedaliah Fleer

Four months after sneaking into Uman for the first time, Gedaliah Fleer returned with an official tour group of Breslovers led by Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld in December 1963. This time, the mayor of Uman himself accompanied them.

THE WOMAN WHO lived in the house adjoining the *tziyun* was flustered when she saw a group of tourists, the mayor with his assistant, and several policemen standing outside. Maria, one of the Intourist guides, tried to explain that the tourists had come to pray in her yard. The woman, however, became hysterical and started screaming that there was no grave in her yard.

“Okay,” said the mayor. “Perhaps this is not the correct house. Let’s look for a grave in someone else’s yard.”

“This is the correct place,” I whispered to Rabbi Zvi Aryeh. “This is the yard, and this is the woman.”

Rabbi Zvi Aryeh repeated my words to the mayor. The mayor, his assistant and the Jewish guide started to argue with us. “What’s the big problem? If you can’t get in to see the grave, forget about it. We’ll take you on a tour of the city. Uman is beautiful.”

We appealed to Maria. “You see. We told you this would happen.”

Maria became furious. “Open the gate immediately!” she shouted at the woman, and then pushed in the gate without waiting for a reply. “Go inside!” she instructed us. No one asked any questions. We entered the yard and I showed the others the exact location of the *tziyun*. The woman who lived there was completely confused. The mayor scratched his head in wonder and we, of course, started to recite the *Tikkun HaKlali*.

It is impossible to describe how we felt standing next to Rebbe Nachman’s holy *tziyun*. We were privileged to remain there for an hour and a half in prayer and *hitbodedut*. By the time we returned to the bus, a wondrous warmth flowed through our veins.

In Moscow, our hotel rooms faced the Kremlin. Since it was Chanukah, we lit the Chanukah menorah. Our joy was beyond words. Watching the tiny flames that symbolized pure belief in God, bringing the light of Torah into the darkness of Russia, we realized that we had been given the privilege of spreading the Rebbe’s light.

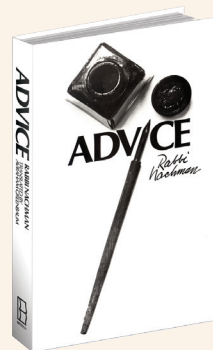
From “Against All Odds”

SIDEPATH

Advice (Likutey Etzot) translated by Avraham Greenbaum

THE COVENANT. 9. A remedy for a nocturnal emission is to talk to one’s friends about their spiritual difficulties and give them encouragement in their search for God (*Likutey Moharan I*, 14:12).

10. Sexual desire is the comprehensive evil. It is the root of all the different kinds of evil found in the seventy nations of the world. Each of the seventy nations and languages is associated with its own special form of evil – an evil character trait, a particular desire for which that people is especially known, etc.



This special evil is what binds this people to the forces of evil. The sexual desire is the sum of all evil. All the different desires found in the seventy nations are, as it were, gathered together and included in this. They all burn together, and the effect is a flaming furnace that urges men on with sexual lust.

But God has separated us from the nations and exalted us above all languages. We must keep apart from all the different kinds of evil found among them. More than anything, we must guard ourselves against sexual desire, which is the sum of all evil. The fact that we keep ourselves apart from this is the essential difference between us and the other nations, and the foundation of the holiness of the Jewish people. Man has the power to uproot this impulse completely. In this lies our sanctity (*ibid. I*, 19:3).



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The photo on the front is a close-up of Rebbe Nachman’s chair, which is displayed in the main Breslov synagogue in Jerusalem.